

Dozen 2,000-M.P.H. Jets Pass Many Severe Tests

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WASHINGTON, March 1—"The United States has developed 11 or 12 of the phenomenal A-11 jet fighters, and all have passed many difficult tests, Senator Richard B. Russell said today.

The Georgia Democrat, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, gave this additional information about the 2,000-mile-an-hour aircraft, which was a secret for five years.

President Johnson ended the secrecy at his news conference yesterday. He said he had revealed the plane "to permit the orderly exploitation of this advanced technology in our military and commercial programs."

Senator Russell said that while tests of the experimental craft were continuing the prototype was nearly ready for acceptance by the Air Force as a warplane.

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He spoke on the Columbia Broadcasting System's radio and television program "Face the Nation."

Meanwhile, defense officials stressed that commercial applications of the new long-range interceptor were expected to develop from the metallurgical and engineering "breakthroughs" rather than the conversion of the aircraft or its design.

President Johnson is scheduled to make public tomorrow a report by Eugene R. Black and Stanley de J. Osborne on the Administration's plans for a supersonic transport plane.

The A-11 is credited with a cruising altitude of more than 70,000 feet. Its range is measured in "thousands of miles."

The U-2 reconnaissance plane, which, like the A-11, was manufactured by the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, is understood to be capable of cruising at 90,000 feet. Its estimated speed is less than 500 miles an hour.

The F-106 and F-4-C fighter

can go 1,600 miles an hour over short distances.

Mr. Johnson noted yesterday that the performance of the long, rocket-shaped A-11, which apparently is powered by two Pratt & Whitney engines, "far exceeds that of any other aircraft in the world today."

"His decision to make public the existence of the plane, which was initiated in 1959 under the Eisenhower Administration, caught many informed persons by surprise. The President admonished those associated with the program to refrain from talking about it.

New arguments were expected to arise over the future of the Air Force. The Administration is now in a controversy with Air Force leaders and majorities in Congress over the merits of substantial investments in new manned planes. It is being charged with overreliance on long-range ballistic missiles.

Three major issues appeared to be taking shape. The first was why the Air Force had been fighting for a new IMI, or Improved Manned Interceptor, when it already had the A-11.

Senator Russell said today he did not know why the Air Force had sought \$40 million to push

the development of an IMI.

Because of his knowledge of the existence of the A-11, he said, he led the successful Senate opposition to the IMI in the military authorization bill last week.

But that did not explain why his Democratic colleague from Georgia, Representative Carl Vinson, who presumably was also informed of the A-11 program, had successfully fought to include \$40 million for the IMI in the House bill. Mr. Vinson heads the House Armed Services Committee.

The second issue was whether the Administration would be willing to produce the A-11 for military operations.

In testimony before Congress in January, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara stressed his interest in the development of manned interceptors to cope with a possible future threat of Soviet long-range bombers, as distinguished from the Soviet missile capability.

"But until we can better discern the character of the future manned bomber threat and determine the proper balance among the three basic elements of our defense posture; i.e., defense against manned bombers, defense against ICBMs and submarine-launched missiles, and civil defense, it would be pre-

mature to make a choice," he said.

Recalling that statement, Air Force supporters questioned whether Mr. McNamara would regard an order to produce the A-11 any less premature than a decision to produce other types of interceptor.

According to one explanation of Air Force pressure for the IMI, its uniformed leaders had sought to gain a commitment for production of the A-11 all along, but had had no other way of campaigning for that objective openly.

The third issue concerned the announced breakthrough in the use of titanium.

A reason given by the Defense Department in turning down the Boeing Aircraft Company's proposal for the TFX plane was the suggested use of titanium. Mr. McNamara, saying the use of that metal was risky, gave the controversial contract to the General Dynamics Corporation.

Officials sought to head off criticism in the light of President Johnson's praise of the use of titanium for the A-11.

Their chief explanation was that knowledge of the metal's limitations obtained in the A-11 program had made it possible to evaluate its use in the TFX, and to decide against it.